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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TIRANA 000618

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: SP INSIDER: NO END IN SIGHT TO BOYCOTT; DISCUSSES
NEW CABINET

Classified By: CDA Deborah A. Jones, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Ben Blushi, Socialist Party MP and member of the SP's ruling body (and prominent critic of SP Chairman Edi Rama), told PolOff on September 11 that Edi Rama will try to sustain the SP's boycott of Parliament until PM Berisha agrees to negotiate with Rama over SP demands. In blasting the boycott, Blushi said it undermines Albanian democracy and Albania's image as a NATO country. While he and other SP deputies may defy Rama and enter the Parliament, they are likely to be expelled from the Party in doing so. Rama's tactic is to become PM via a peaceful "color revolution" ala Ukraine or Georgia. Blushi also said several cabinet nominees had no idea they were even being considered for cabinet posts until the nominations were made public. Interior Minister-designate Lulzim Basha would use his job as Interior Minister to push for EU visa liberalization and to position himself to run for Mayor of Tirana in 2011. END SUMMARY.

It's All About Me

2. (C) Blushi, who has been Edi Rama's most vocal critic from within the SP since the June elections, said Rama will continue the boycott until PM Berisha enters into negotiations with the SP over a list of eight SP demands (demands that have been made public) that the SP says must be met as a condition for ending the boycott. Blushi derided many of the SP demands as totally unreasonable, particularly the requests for the formation of an SP-dominated parliamentary committee to investigate allegations of electoral fraud as well as the demand that all parliamentary committees have equal SP and DP representation. Blushi said Rama was also seeking unspecified "political guarantees" from Berisha that would secure Rama's role as Tirana's main power broker. At the end of the day, Blushi said, the SP boycott of parliament has less to do with parliament than with Rama's role as Mayor of Tirana.

3. (C) Blushi said that because Rama is not in Parliament he has little to lose by continuing the boycott. Blushi claimed that Rama sees the legislature as a weak rubber stamp body for the PM, and thus does not believe that even a long-term boycott will damage democracy or stability in Albania or impede the work of the government. Blushi said Rama cares only about his own role as Mayor of Tirana and SP Chairman, and claimed that Rama is using the boycott in part to force PM Berisha to give unspecified "political guarantees" to Rama in order to secure Rama's position as Tirana's main power broker. Blushi said the coalition between Berisha's Democratic Party (DP) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) means the SP no longer controls the Tirana city council, effectively stripping Rama of his ability to control building permits in the city and cutting Rama off from his base of support among Albania's prominent construction companies and builders.

To the Barricades!

4. (C) Blushi said Rama has deluded himself into thinking that the only way the SP can take power is via a "color revolution", ala Ukraine or Georgia. Blushi said Rama envisions using massive, but peaceful, demonstrations to force PM Berisha to resign, and has even ordered brightly colored scarves for protestors to wear. Blushi said few SP members would likely follow Rama onto the streets for mass demonstrations (an observation echoed by numerous other observers) and ridiculed Rama's planned revolution as little more than a fantasy. Blushi said Rama at this point sees no point

in taking part in the 2011 local elections, and will probably push for an SP boycott of the elections altogether.

Blushi Urges Internationals to Speak Out

15. (C) Blushi said recent comments by the OSCE, EU and UK Ambassadors in Tirana that "the opposition belongs in the

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Parliament," were helpful, but not strong enough to influence Edi Rama. Blushi said Rama and others in the SP were waiting for the U.S. to speak out, and said only a statement by the U.S. could push Rama into ending the boycott. Blushi dismissed the idea that a boycott of parliament is an internal political dispute, saying that an extended boycott will undermine both democracy and stability in Albania, set a negative precedent for the future, and hinder Albania's EU aspirations.

16. (C) Blushi said that eventually he and a small group of other SP Deputies might break ranks with Rama and enter the Parliament, but admitted he and the others are reluctant to do so just yet. Blushi said anyone who defies Rama by entering the Parliament will be expelled from the SP. Blushi said "nearly everyone" in the 25-member SP's ruling body (known as the Chairmanship or Presidency) privately opposes the boycott, but only a small handful have condemned it publicly. Blushi said he and others opposed to the boycott would hold a small rally on the evening of September 11 to publicly call on Rama to end the boycott.

Nominees Caught by Surprise; Basha for Mayor?

17. (C) Blushi said several of PM Berisha's picks for cabinet posts had no idea they were even being considered for cabinet positions until Berisha publicly announced his nominees on the evening of September 9. Blushi said he met with Defense Minister-designate Arben Imami only two hours before Imami's nomination was announced publicly and that Imami had no inkling he was even being considered for a cabinet post. Blushi said several picks were also caught totally off guard.

Blushi said current Foreign Minister and former nominee Lulzim Basha was picked or introduced both to promote EU liberalization and opposition to Basha for a run or Myro Tirana in 2011. Blushi said PM Berisha's new Democratic Party and not Foreign Minister Ilir Meta to get credit for liberalization has partially explaining why Basha will go to MoI. Blushi said Basha will also use his position at the MoI to position himself for a run for Tirana Mayor in 2011. Blushi said Berisha appears to be grooming Basha - at least for now - to become the next DP leader.

19. (C) COMMENT: As Rama's leading critic within the SP, Blushi certainly has reason to paint Rama in the worst possible terms. But Blushi is a serious and well-respected politician, not given to hyperbole or excessive spin. He has positioned himself within the SP as the leader of the anti-Rama faction, urging Rama to accept the fact that the SP lost the parliamentary elections and move on. Blushi's claim that Rama has no incentive to end the parliamentary boycott anytime soon tracks with what Post has heard from numerous other sources, and Rama has in the past used the threat of street demonstrations and boycotts to try and attract the attention of the international community and force concessions from the Berisha government. At this point, the danger of large street demonstrations is slim, but the boycott is likely to continue for the time being. At some point, the boycott will become a serious impediment to the functioning of the Albanian government, as the DP-led majority lacks the 84 votes necessary to pass certain key pieces of legislation. END COMMENT.

JONES